

Anglican Church International



## **Eating the Bread of Life**

*A Reflection on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for Lent III 03/08/2626.*

For the RCL readings go here: :

<http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/lections.php?season=Lent&year=A>

By

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## **Summary generated by Microsoft Word Copilot**

*This document is a theological reflection by The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland on the Revised Common Lectionary readings for the third Sunday in Lent. It explores themes of faith, salvation, suffering, and the nature of worship through an analysis of the Epistle and Gospel readings, drawing heavily on the writings of Paul and the Gospel of John.*

### ***Justification by Faith and Suffering***

*The reflection begins by examining the Epistle's teaching that believers are "justified by faith," explaining that suffering leads to endurance, which builds character and hope, sustained by God's love poured into hearts through the Holy Spirit. The author references Tenney's interpretation of Romans, emphasizing that the letter was meant to teach truth and prepare the Roman church for missionary work. Romans reveals God's righteousness and the need for salvation through Christ, who provides both legal and personal righteousness accepted by faith. Through Christ's death and life, all—both Jews and Gentiles, sinners and the ungodly—are reconciled and saved, a concept that challenges common human judgments about worthiness .*

### ***The Gospel of Living Water and Spirit Worship***

*The Gospel reading contrasts fleeting earthly water with the eternal "water" Christ offers, symbolizing the Spirit that quenches spiritual thirst permanently. Worship is described as not tied to any location but as worshipping "in spirit and truth," aligning with the inclusive message of Romans to Gentiles. The narrative highlights the unexpected role of a Samaritan woman in spreading Christ's word, illustrating the wider reach of salvation beyond traditional boundaries. Christ's declaration that His "food" is to do the will of God and complete His work underscores that spiritual nourishment comes from proclaiming the Word, paralleling how food and water sustain the body .*

### ***Living the Vision of Christ***

*The reflection then discusses the implications of these teachings, urging a shift from seeking temporary pleasures to seeking God as the ultimate end. It challenges social judgments and calls for embracing and loving others, even those marginalized or deemed unworthy, as a reflection of Christ's reconciling work. Lent is presented as a time for self-examination to recognize when one has turned away from God and to appreciate the unconditional gift of salvation through faith .*

### ***Contextualizing John's Gospel***

*Looking deeper into the Gospel of John, the reflection explains that John presents Jesus as the Word (Logos), a universal figure embodying Eternal Reason and revealing God. The Gospel's purpose is to lead readers to believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and thus have life in His name. Key themes include signs (miracles), belief (trust and receiving Christ into one's life), and life (a new, divine life that transforms consciousness and interaction with the world). Belief is defined as making Christ part of one's life, and life is the fullness of salvation experienced now and eternally .*

### ***Christ as the Bread of Life and Our Example***

*Christ is portrayed as the example of this new life and the embodiment of God's vision for humanity's fulfillment. Believers are called to imitate Christ by seeking permanence in God rather than transient pleasures, by serving others through proclaiming the Word, and by recognizing Christ in all people, including those socially marginalized. The incarnation of the Word provides a template for living and acting in alignment with God's vision. By "eating the bread of life," which means embodying and proclaiming Christ's Word through forgiveness and love, believers walk in the light of Christ and enable God's life-giving presence to nourish others*

### ***Contemporary Relevance and Prayer***

*The reflection acknowledges current global and social challenges—such as pandemics, wars, social unrest, and injustices—and emphasizes the call to live and worship in the Spirit of Truth. Just as food and water sustain the body, so do water, Spirit, and the Word sustain the soul. The author concludes with a prayer asking God to protect body and soul so that the bread of life may work through believers for the life of the world .*

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***Blessings and peace*** are extended to all, signed by The Rt. Rev. Dr. Michael W. Holland,  
Founding Bishop of the Anglican Church International .

## Eating the Bread of Life

Here are some thoughts on the readings:

### Epistle

1. We are told that we are “justified by faith.” What does this mean?
2. What can come through suffering other than pain so that we would have no reason but to complain? Here we are told that suffering > endurance > character > hope which never fails us since “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” According to Tenney (1980):

“Romans was written as a substitute for immediate personal contact and as preparatory for making the Roman church a missionary center comparable to Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, and the other cities where Paul had labored. Romans, therefore, unlike Corinthians, is not devoted so much as to the correction of errors as to the teaching of truth. ... - it does give a fuller and more systematic view of the heart of Christianity than any other of Paul’s epistles, with the possible exception of Ephesians. ... .

The central theme of Romans is the revelation of the righteousness of God to man and its application to spiritual need. ... .

First, the theme is announced: “... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (1:16). The need for that power is shown in the fall of the world, Jew and Gentile alike, so that “there is none righteous, no not one” (3:10). If, then, all are helpless and condemned, relief must come from without by providing for them both a legal and a personal righteousness. This is found in Christ, “whom God set forth *to be* propitiation, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of sins done aforetime” (3:25). Since the sinner cannot earn his salvation, this righteousness must be accepted by faith. Individually and racially man is restored to his right position before God through the grace manifested in Christ.”

3. Through Christ’s death we are reconciled with God and through His life we are saved from the wrath of God. **All** are saved through Christ, including the “ungodly” “sinners.” It is worth noting here that this runs counter to the way we normally think. Consider two men drowning, one who has spent his life helping others and a murderer. We tend to think the former is worth saving whereas the latter is not. Both, however are saved through Christ. Thank God for this for we all are sinners – we all turn away from God in thought, word, and deed by turning away from each other- and through Christ He has reconciled us with Him and we are saved, given the ability to live through our reconciliation with each other – Jews and Gentiles and ... .

## Gospel

1. Change vs. permanence is a theme as is from Earth and from GOD. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." What God offers us is permanent not fleeting, eternal water gushing up through us that no one need be thirsty.
2. There is no particular place to worship God. For God is spirit and to worship Him is to worship in spirit and truth. *This is in line with a theme of Romans as in it St. Paul addresses the gentiles in Rome.*
3. In any case, what is it to worship in spirit and truth?
4. Note that it is through the woman to whom the disciples would not expect Him to be talking that His word is spread and to Samaritans none the less.
5. Note that others first believed through the word of another and then saw for themselves. We are inevitably in their position, not first hand.
6. "**My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work**" Note that what feeds the Spirit is proclaiming the Word. Does this mean that we need not eat?
7. In the Gospel reading we have some analogies. As food feeds the body so proclaiming the Word (ministry) feeds the soul. As water quenches thirst of the body, so baptism by water and the spirit quenches the thirst of the soul. And this is permanent. We have from God through Christ, by water and the Spirit, an endless spring of water, of what is needed for life, for life of our souls, the source of our living by proclaiming the Word, springing forth through us to nourish others.

What are we to make of this?

Christ came into the world to save all of the world, to reconcile all of God's Creation with Him, regardless of our being unworthy of this gift. But through this gift all are justified by faith in it, redeemed.

But this entails taking a different look at things than we are accustomed to taking:

1. We are drawn to seek that which is not permanent as our final end and in so doing turn away from God. Here, in general, pleasure comes to mind.
2. We are drawn to judge those who do not act as we would have them act, but God gave His only Son so that all that have not acted as He would have them act might have eternal life.
3. We tend to think of those lower on the social ladder than ourselves as unworthy of associating with let alone being listened to, but it is through them that God speaks to us. And, thus, in doing

this we turn away from God. But through Christ we can be reconciled if we turn to Him by faith moving to change our way of being in the world.

Lent, as has been said, is a time when we examine ourselves to discover when we have turned away from God. Such an examination naturally leads us to see the unconditional gift of salvation given us by God in and through Christ to all who turn to Him.

### **Context**

[[Looking back from the perspective of the John's Gospel - For John Jesus was the Word made flesh. In the beginning there was the Word and the Word was ... .

The prologue (1:1-18) begins by using the term *word* to introduce the person of Christ. This term differs from those used in the other Gospels, for it does not connote any particular religious background. *Christ* is Jewish; *Lord* is Gentile; *Jesus* is human; but *Word* or *Logos* is philosophical. John thus makes the subject of his Gospel a universal figure, the incarnation of Eternal Reason who is God, who came from God, and who reveals God as a son reveals a father. He is to be apprehended by those who receive Him (1:12), and the conflict between those who receive Him and those who do not is likened to the conflict between light and darkness (Tenney, p.193)

In the gospel reading for today we discover that we are not to live by bread & water alone but from the Word which is Christ given us through Him by water and the Spirit. Notably Christ, for John, just is Eternal Reason. But how?

More background. What is the overriding point John is attempting to get across? According to Tenney (1980):

“The key to the content of the Gospel of John is the author’s own statement in John 20:30,31:

*‘Many other signs therefore did Jesus un the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.’”*

[Central, then, is seeing Jesus is not just another man, but rather is Christ]

Three words are prominent in this brief passage: *signs, believe, life*. [The signs are miracle Jesus performed for others and] operated precisely in the areas where man is unable to effect any change of laws or conditions which affect his life. ... .

[So signs are God in Christ doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves by our willpower alone]

The second word, *believe*, is the key word in the Gospel, ... . It is customarily translated *believe*, though sometimes it is rendered *trust* or *commit* (see 2:24). ... . John defines belief in Christ as receiving Him (1:12), making Him a part of one's life. ... .

[So to "believe" in Christ is to make Him part of our lives. But how do we make Christ part of our lives?]

The third word in the key to the Gospel is *life*, which, in Johanne language, is the sum total of all that is imparted to the believer in his salvation. ... . Life, according to John, is not just animal vitality or the course of human existence. It involves a kind of nature, a new consciousness, interaction with environment, and constant development. Christ is presented as the example of this life which is God's gift to the Christian and God's goal for the Christian.

[So Christ is an example. Of what?]

These three words, *signs*, *belief*, *life*, provide a logical organization for the Gospel. In the *signs* is the revelation of God; in *belief* is the reaction that they are designed to produce; in *life* is the result that belief brings." (Tenney, p.p. 189-191)

Tenney claims that for John the Word is something apprehended. If so, then the Word is something to be seen with the mind's eye, something that once grasped moves the heart and the result is life in Christ here and now. What is seen is a new way of viewing the world and one's place/function in it. A new Vision, if you will, God's Vision, God's Vision for man, for man's fulfillment (our fulfillment) and the fulfillment of all His creation. And our fulfillment is life here and now and life eternal. We live by "believing" in Christ, making Him a part of our lives. And we do this by making ourselves in act in His Vision by imitating Christ in all we do:

1. Seek that which is permanent as the final end of all we do, God, rather than what is not, pleasure, etc.
2. Give ourselves in service of proclaiming the Word to those who do not act as we would have them act so they might obtain life now and life eternal through Christ rather than judging and turning away from them.
3. Commune with all of God's creation including those supposedly "lower" on the social ladder than ourselves seeking to see Christ in all persons – at least in part because God speaks to us through all His creation – rather than turning away from them as not worthy of our association.

God made the Word flesh so that we might have a template, a guide, by which we can act into being, into life on the basis of that Vision, the Vision made flesh, the bread of life. When we eat the bread of life, which is to say proclaim/act on the Word, forgiving others as we are forgiven by Him, loving others as we are loved by Him, we walk in His light, the light of Christ – we walk in the light of Christ – and find life in Him, dwell in Him and He in us. And in so walking God's gift to us through Christ by water and the Spirit spring forth through us to nourish others in our so proclaiming the

Word in thought, word, and deed. In so proclaiming, we feed our souls and He (the Word), through us, is for us and others, through our interactions with each other, our bread of life.

Especially given the challenges we face today with respect to the –corona virus, and now measles, war in Ukraine, war in Iran, social unrest, people being killed by ICE as well as imprisoned without due process here in the USA, the USA cutting off aid to people who are starving in other countries leading to their deaths, etc., - we see that we are all part of mankind and are called by God to live and worship in the Spirit of Truth. As food and water are to the body, so water and the Spirit, and the Word are to our selves. Our food, then, **“is to do the will of him who sent me/us and to complete his work.”** We live and worship in Spirit and Truth when we allow ourselves to be that through which God in and through Christ is the bread of life for each of us, for each other. We live and worship in Spirit and Truth when we say, I give my flesh, my self, my soul and body so that the bread of life can work through me for the life of the world.

Let us pray,

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul, so that the bread of life can work through us for the life of the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. ***Amen.***

### **Reference**

Tenney, Merrill C. *New Testament Survey*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980.

BLESSINGS and PEACE to ALL!!!  
+MWH

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